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The No. 1 Spy

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What are the qualifications for the nation's No. 1 spy? Should he, for instance, look like one?

John A. McCone, the President's nominee to be director of the Central Intelligence Agency, does not. This, of course, could be a plus, since it might confuse the enemy. No one looking at McCone's open face, his white hair and brown eyes, would ever suspect him of trying to decipher invisible writing or following someone down a dark street.

Sitting stiffly before the Senate Armed Services Committee in his dark blue suit at his confirmation hearings, he looked like the successful business executive he once was.

McCone does not move his lips when he talks. Nor does he talk much. He didn't volunteer a thing to the Senators. When they asked him questions which in other nominees would have set off a Fourth of July oration, he said in his tight-lipped fashion that he would prefer not to comment, except possibly in executive session.

But a spy shows his stuff not by what he says himself but by what he gets other people to tell him, and the meeting in the Armed Services Committee room did not give McCone any opportunities along that line.

Should a spy be an old hand or a "natural" newcomer? That question came up, and McCone said frankly he had no experience in intelligence and investigation work, which, considering some of the recent mishaps of the agency he will head, might be all to the good.

Still, he seems to lack the natural curiosity which might be considered essential in the spy game. When Sen. Smith, the Maine Republican, asked him who had recommended his appointment, McCone said he did not know.

This would indicate at least that McCone, a serious 60-year-old, pays no heed to Washington gossip, which had it that he owes his present job to the President's brother, Attorney General Kennedy, who headed a special committee to investigate the CIA after the Cuban misadventure.

Sen. McCarthy, Democrat of Minnesota, who is not a member of the Armed Services Committee which must decide if McCone fills the bill as the nation's No. 1 spy, had an idea of what the nation's super spy should be.

Said Sen. McCarthy: "He should be a man who is self-possessed, restrained and detached."

McCarthy suggested to members of the committee that since Congress can know nothing about the Central Intelligence Agency, it should know everything possible about the man who runs it. He issued an invitation to the committee to consider the whole character of McCone.

The committee did not respond favorably to McCarthy's statement, which he called "a paper," betraying his academic background. The most serious question he raised was in connection with McCone's treatment of a group of 10 California Institute of Technology scientists who in 1956 called for a moratorium on nuclear testing. McCone wrote a letter taking exception to the scientists' views, which, he said, were "obviously designed to create fear in the minds of the uninformed that radioactive fallout from H Bomb tests endangers life."

Sen. McCarthy said "it had been reported" that McCone, a trustee of the Institute, had demanded that the 10 scientists be fired.

He said he did not know whether it is true or not, but that the committee should inquire about the matter.

At least one member of the committee, Sen. Symington, Democrat of Missouri, said he found Sen. McCarthy's appearance "somewhat unique."

Symington's investigations had convinced him that there has "never been a better public servant in Washington" than McCone.

The nominee listened to him impassively.

"We have heard a lot of chatter about academic freedom," said Symington with great briskness. "You were a trustee and you had a certain responsibility and you wrote a letter saying you disagreed with these men and you did not ask they be discharged."

Sen. Symington congratulated President Kennedy for nominating such an excellent man to be his No. 1 spy.